THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

CLM Editor At Large

SE Life

HD **St. Greta Spreads the Climate Gospel; A movement that believes in sin, penance and salvation doesn't sound very scientific**

BY By Gerard Baker

WC 832 words

PD 20 September 2019

ET 07:21 AM

SN The Wall Street Journal Online

SC WSJO

LA English

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It's been noted before that the cause of addressing climate change has become something like the modern world's version of a secular religion. In much of Europe especially, but in sections of American society too, a kind of climate theology has replaced traditional Christianity as the ultimate source of authority over human behavior, comprising both an all-embracing teleology of our existence and a prescriptive moral code.

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The High Church of Environmentalism has acquired many of the characteristics of its ecclesiastical predecessor. An apocalyptic eschatology warns that we will all be consumed by fire if we don't follow the ordained rules. The notion that it is our sinful nature that has brought us to mortal peril—from the Original Sin of a carbon-unleashing industrial revolution to daily transgressions with plastic bottles and long-haul flights—is as central to its message as it was to the Catholic Church's. But repentance is near. A gospel of redemption emphasizes that salvation lies in reducing our carbon footprint, with reusable shopping bags and bike-sharing. The secular authorities preach the virtues of abstinence. Meatless Fridays are no longer just for Lenten observance.

Now its proponents will scoff, of course, and say there's a critical difference: The climate imperative is science-based, the opposite of religion. Its bishops are Nobel-winners; its biblical texts are peer-reviewed papers. But most people who express strong adherence to the climate change gospel know and understand as much about the science of carbon emissions or the greenhouse effect as the average medieval villager understood about the Creation or trans-substantiation.

In the iconography of traditional religion, children have often played a central role. The revelation of universal truth to an innocent child is an inspiring story that is very effective in both offering role models and propagating the faith. There's a reason the European faithful used to venerate St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Bernadette of Lourdes, the children of Fatima in Portugal: The testimony of a guileless child is a powerful weapon against skepticism.

Enter the Swedish 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, now come amongst us in New York for Climate Week. Her story is compelling: It recalls that of St. Bernadette, exposed to the truth as a child and animated with a passionate mission to share it with the rest of humanity. As with child saints of the conventional type, Ms. Thunberg has overcome and indeed channeled personal challenges (she calls her autism a "superpower" rather than a disability) and has proved a remarkable inspiration to fellow teenagers throughout the world.

Like the children of Fatima, she has a simple message that, if followed, promises to save the world from catastrophe. And now we have the near miraculous spectacle of her sailing across the Atlantic without emitting a molecule of carbon dioxide. Well, almost: It seems that perhaps there was some climate-altering emission involved after all. But it was a brilliant stunt. She could not have made a bigger impact if she'd walked across.

None of this is to denigrate Ms. Thunberg. She's clearly a sincere and talented young woman who has dedicated herself to what she believes to be the highest moral cause. Agree or disagree with "climate crisis" rhetoric and some of the methods deployed in its name, but one can't help being impressed by her diligence in pursuit of duty and principle in an age with so many less wholesome activities for teenagers.

Still, there is something about this near-religious fervor among the climate change activists—a growing fanaticism—that recalls some of the more troubling traits of extreme religious cults. Its status now as almost universally accepted doctrine risks precluding necessary debates about practicalities and policies. If human extinction is really only decades away, as some activists claim, the implications are millenarian.

The case for man-made climate change is highly compelling, but the more apocalyptic the rhetoric, the less likely it is that good decisions will be made. Talk of extinction forces us to ignore the balance between economic growth and both the causes of and potential remedies for climate peril. There is an often ignored virtuous irony in our planet's destructive progress. While carbon-heavy growth is damaging the planet, it is also producing the technological prowess to address the damage.

Take China alone. In the last 40 years its economy has grown at an average rate of almost 10% a year, pouring incalculable numbers of carbon molecules into the atmosphere. But the scientific and technological innovations that growth enabled have resulted in the invention there of some of the most important advances in tackling climate change.

Rather than simply bewailing the costs of growth, Old Testament-style, we should be mindful of its redemptive benefits too. Surely we can all say amen to that.

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RE namz : North America | usa : United States

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AN Document WSJO000020190920ef9k00335

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